Weave Three: My Sankofa Great Story – Maroons and Sankofa Bird as a Twin Appliqué in Celebration of the Africentric Idea

Home Education Included with Africentric Idea and Patterns of Secret, Sacred and Cover Stories the Co-creators of Cloth and Our Successes

That bird is wise,
Look. Its beak, back turned, picks
For the present, what is best from ancient eyes,
Then steps forward, on ahead
to meet the future, undeterred.

Kayper-Mensah's "*Sankofa*," (1976, p. 4) poem

Introduction

In this Weave the focus is on the emergence of the Sankofa Learning Centre, how I got involved and the background educational conditions that motivated parents/carers of children of African heritage to radical action. I do so because it was a significant event in the makings and unmaking in the making of me, and educator in whom the African Voice had surfaced as a live commitment.

I also share why I subscribed to the term 'Maroons' to depict the actions of the co-creators (I am included) of the Sankofa Learning Centre, what the name Sankofa meant for me, and the significance of our embrace of the educational model of "home education included with the "Africentric Idea." These are important threads in the Weave.

It is with this background that I begin to tell the Sankofa Learning Centre Great Story, which is framed as a collective endeavour (I am because we are) and in the context of peoples of African heritage resistance to oppression in the UK.

The sign displayed on the fruitful Kindah Tree in the Accompong Maroon village in Jamaica proclaims, 'We are Family'. This according to Jean Besson (1999, p.42) symbolises in 'Accompong' the common kinship of the corporate creole community on its common land. In the Sankofa Learning Centre whether as child, parent, teacher, student or community member, 'We are family' would be in recognition of our own traditions of African social solidarity, mutuality and sense of communal responsibilities as we experienced in our 'common place'.

The idea that would lead to the founding of the Sankofa Learning Centre was intimated to me in 1997. I had been back in the UK under two years after my five-year sojourn in Jamaica (I say more in Weave Four), without any long-term intention to stay.

However, I would be convinced of the dream of introducing a facility for children of African origin, the innovation and the opportunity to do something purposeful in my community by Eden Charles (not that I needed much convincing). Charles is a friend of some longevity, a decided part of my neighbourhood, and a brother, to use a traditional term to describe our closeness and our activism in struggle (I say more on our relationship in Appendix Six).

In 1998 the year of the Sankofa Learning Centre's introduction concerns about the educational system in Britain not delivering was not a new phenomenon amongst peoples of African heritage.

This is affirmed in the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Review (2006), which framed the experiences of migrants from the Caribbean and Africa as "From

High Hopes to Low Expectations". This one strapline fully described the disappointment felt by black communities, particularly since the 1950s and into present times. The DfES publication (Getting It, Getting It Right, 2006) noted:

> *In the 1950s and 60s, tens of thousands of Black people came to Britain from the former British colonies in the Caribbean and Africa…*
>
> *The majority of these migrants (particularly those from the Caribbean) came to fill low-paid jobs in industries such as manufacturing, communications, transport and healthcare, where there was a labour shortage. However, social histories recount that they came with greater aspirations for their children and that many hoped that by settling in the UK, they would secure a better education for them.*
>
> *The reality of British education for migrant children was in stark contrast to the high hopes of their parents. They faced open racism from staff and other pupils, discrimination in teacher assessment and culturally biased testing, and were frequently excluded from the mainstream after being deemed 'Educationally Sub-Normal'* (p.5)

Bernard Coard (1971) had long informed the African Caribbean community that the education secured for their children too often saw them placed in ESN schools and labelled as underachievers. Coard (1971) noted:

> *"The Black child labours under three crucial handicaps... Low expectations on … performance in a white-controlled system of education; (2) Low motivation to succeed academically because … the cards are stacked; and finally, (3) Low teacher expectations which affect the amount of effort … by the teacher, and (the child's) image … and … abilities." (p. 21.)*

Dianne Abbott, as if continuing from where the DfES Review quote ends, and connecting with Coard (1971), speaking at the London Schools and the Black Child Conference (2008) explained:

> *Since that time, academics, activists, black commentators and educators have raised the issue of how the school system fails black children. However, they have not simply addressed issues relating to the failure of the mainstream school system. They also give evidence of a proud history of community-based initiatives, Saturday schools and other projects that the African community have developed in order to help the raise educational standards relating to their children from a perspective of self-help.'*(Abbott 2008)

Many of the parents who would become co-creators in the Sankofa Learning Centre initiative believed that the school system was failing black children (were failing their own children). Many also had been involved in a range of initiatives that would have included involvement in the Saturday school movement. Indeed, a number of the parents were still involved in them when Sankofa was introduced and continue to be so to this day.

Therefore, in 1998 there was already a well-documented history of the failure of UK schools to meet the needs of pupils of African heritage. I say the failure of UK schools deliberately for this is a reframe on the oft-presented notion of the 'underachievement of the child of African Caribbean background'. This reframe shifts the characterisation of underachievement away from African students and their families onto the education system. It is argued that this is how the education of the African child in the education system has to be seen, and challenges the dominating discourse of their 'under-achievement' that has so influenced thinking since the 1970s and continues to do so.

At the heart of this dominating discourse is the fixation on the comparison of GCSE attainment levels across ethnicity and gender, and the particular highlighting of the low attainment of pupils of African Caribbean background as their failure. This has had a harsh impact upon African Caribbean young men. Ken Livingstone, London Mayor, (2004), six years after Sankofa's commencement could write alarmingly that:

> *In 2003-4 only 10 per cent of the poorest Black Caribbean boys in London achieved 5 or more A* - C grades at GCSE level, according to new performance standards which must include English and Maths. The potential damage to the future employment prospects for those boys who do not meet these standards is obvious.* (p. foreword)

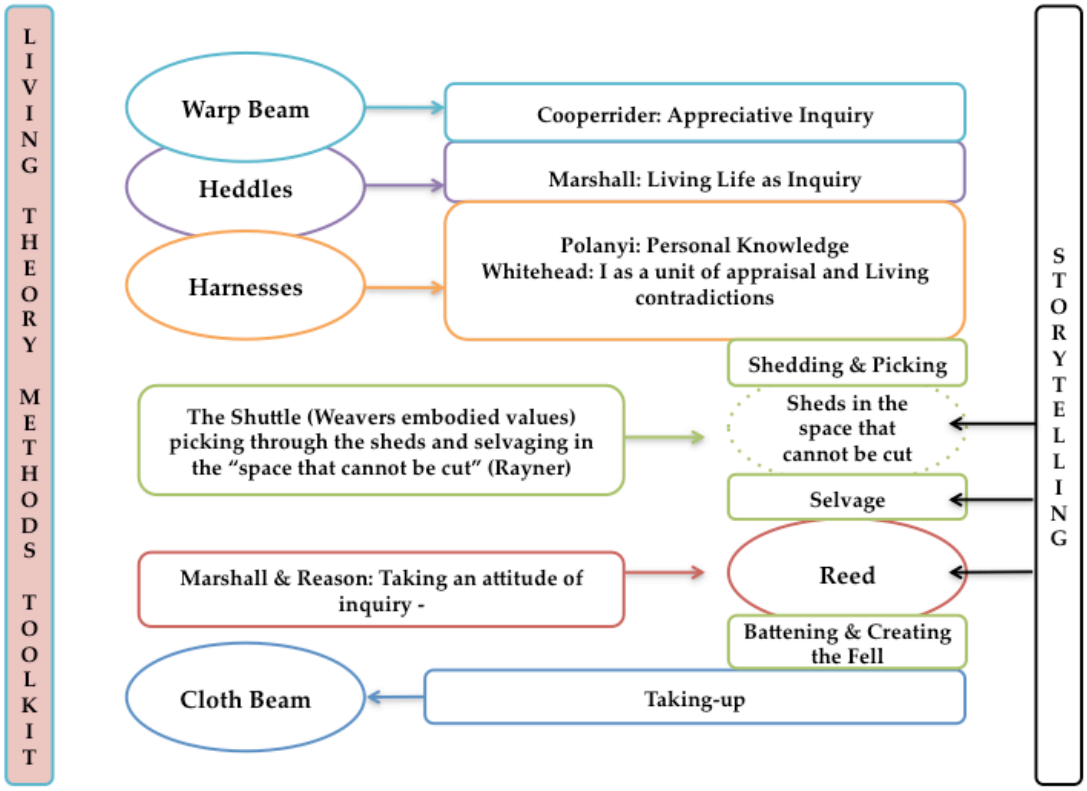
It was as a result of the above conditions that the co-creators of the Sankofa Learning Centre were compelled to act. I say as Maroons, I am included, and with such a depiction, reveal the threads that evidence my representation. I am at the loom.

Remember, Cooperrider is on the warp beam and provokes the inquiry process, starting from strengths. Marshall on the heddles complements Cooperrider and is focused on the inner and outer threads as the Weave lives. The harnesses in co-creation with the heddles creates a raising and lowering amongst their partners, which in synchronicity, raise and lower the warp yarns vertically to create surfacings, openings, called sheds. This activity is occurring in the "space that cannot be cut" (Rayner 2011), unlike the threads, and is called shedding.

Polanyi proffering a tacit dimension on personal knowledge is passionate that the Weave must be public (Polanyi 1958, p.327) amongst the harnesses. Whitehead's (1989), unit of appraisal is alongside and used to explicate the Weavers influence in the Weave, that of others and co-creation. "Living contradictions" is also there ensuring that standards of judgement extant are ethical and remains true to my values (Whitehead 1989).

The sheds, as surfacings in the space that cannot be cut (Rayner 2004, 2011) are inserted by and inserts the shuttle aligned with the weft threads. The shuttle makes use of and is used in these surfacings to enable the dynamic intertwining of weft and warp (revealing significant events) as it picks and is received by the sheds as it selvages (scaffolds ornamentally) in the creation of the Cloth.

Figure 18: The Loom – My Living Theory Methodology Toolkit Included with Narrative



The Weaver with head, heart and spirit in complementation has now awakened embodied values to act to know. I am the Weaver in whom the African Voice has surfaced as a live commitment to be in the room (in the space that cannot be cut, Rayner, 2004), and it is if I am compelled to create My Emergent African Great Story (My Unique Cloth).

It is a vital and dynamic inclusion that occurs and is occurring 'within and throughout' as well as 'between' the 'threads' of the weave as 'labyrinthine channels of communication in "the space that cannot be cut". This is Rayner's natural inclusion (Rayner, 2004) and it is in this space that I am "beholding" the 'African Voice', which is being celebrated and revealed through living theory methodology.

Marshall and Reason (1994) on the reed validate each Weave as my Unique Cloth is

created and through their employment the quality of each Weave is secured (battened) and assured (through fells as quality marks and milestones) in engagement with the Weaver and shuttle aligned. On completion of each Weave, the Weaver takes-up the Weave to the cloth beam and releases the threads from the warp beam. This usually signals rests. However, when one cycle finishes, another can commence. This is how it is with weaving; indeed, this is how it is with life.

As Weaver, my roles as educator, community development worker and organisational consultant are significant in this study, however just as important are my roles in family, community, and of course as student (as a learner). This list is not exhaustive of the roles I play, and there are others used and emergent in my living theory thesis, for example, storyteller, black man, father, son, activist, lover, Maroon, co-creator, initiate and now knowledge-creator. In this Weave I proffer diverse roles and amongst their number the following are included as follows: home educator, co-creator, Maroon, activist and storyteller.

A Maroon Appliqué

The co-creators of the Sankofa Learning Centre could not wait any longer for the Government to "get it right" or for high-sounding strategies to play themselves out. In my view we acted as 'maroons' to escape the unsatisfying prevailing conditions. In this study I have utilised the symbolism of the African traditional weave to communicate my Emergent African Great Story. Here, I apply a Maroon Appliqué to My Cloth to represent the co-creators of the Sankofa Learning Centre act to operate outside of traditional school arrangements, embrace responsibility for their children's education and achieve success on their own terms. It is in this way that I seek to

communicate a way of understanding and explaining the Sankofa initiative in the context of the African experience and its significant historical location within strategies of "resistance to oppression."

According to Tidwell (2002), the common

> *"stereotype of the plantation slave dominated by a white master, stoically bearing abuse is a familiar image. However, not all captured Africans accepted their new role as slave. Practically from the moment they arrived in the New World some Africans rebelled and escaped into the surrounding wilderness to create their own fortified communities."* (p. 1)

Tidwell also gives a view of how the term Maroon came about when he notes:

> *"In 1502 the governor of the tiny Spanish colony on the island of Hispaniola – today known as Haiti and the Dominican Republic - complained to King Ferdinand that both local Taino Indian slaves and the Africans he had imported had run away, joining forces against the colonists. He called them Cimarron, the Spanish version of a Taino word for "feral livestock." The French shortened this to marron, and the English changed it to maroon to refer to those runaway slaves who not only avoided capture, but set up self-sufficient communities in the wilderness"* (p. 1).

Santiago-Valles (2003), states that

> *"Maroon communities stood not only for courage and determination but were also a model of institutions that encouraged production for self-sufficiency and generated support for their ideas and approach."* (pp. 2-3).

However, he also noted their symbolism of cultural opposition to the dominant rationale and sovereign status.

I argue that this was very much characterises Sankofa's existence, and Wynter's (1989) pointed view that the Caribbean story cannot be told without the representation of the Maroons is instructive. Now, I say the same about Sankofa in the story of education in the UK. This is so, not only because of Dr. Eden Charles (2007) making known Sankofa's existence to the academy, but also because of Sankofa's success in the mind, hearts and passions of all those who contributed to or were touched by the initiative. Wynter notes that the "Maroon communities represented; the collective rejection of an assigned role which denied the slaves' history before captivity, and an affirmation of prophetic memories which bound direct experience to the oral tradition (pp. 637-648). Sankofa also represented such a claim in beholding charge of our own destiny and the placing of the African child and the African Voice in the centre of our children's education, as our own responsibilities and contribution to their lives.

Martin, (1972), gives special status to present day Maroons in Jamaica and Sierra Leone. She describes them as 'descendants of the first blacks to win and hold freedom in the New World, representing the first self-governing people within the British Empire' (pp. 143-144). Martin informs on the pride Maroons have in their difference and historical origins and presents them as:

> *"the carriers of a culture that has remained distinctive since 1655 in spite of their small size and frequent contact with outsiders"* (pp. 143-144)

In Jamaica Maroons still live apart from the wider population, much as their ancestors did in remote regions. However, not all Maroon communities were small. In Jamaica and Haiti Maroon communities grew in size and organisation to inflict defeats on European armies.

Santiago-Valles (2003) suggested the Maroons proffered a different perspective from the rebel slaves or fugitives. The Maroons were committed to live in the wilderness away from European society. They created their own blended societies from the mixture of Africans, black creoles, aboriginals, escaped European convicts and Sephardic Jews who sought freedom. They created new solidarities with distinct languages, customs, arts and laws that dissolved African traditions with ideas of diverse others who comprised the escaped (Santiago-Valles 2003).

Olsen (1998) also notes on the independence of the Maroons and show how as activist they inserted their influence in disrupting the fastness of the dominant social order. She notes:

> *Marooning enabled the runaway slaves both to challenge and to escape the plantation or post-plantation order. But it was also intended to articulate, as independently as possible and within the colonial structure, the sociocultural and spiritual modes of being of the minority activists. It made it impossible for the dominant order to assume complete control of the discursive world.*(pp. 52-72)

Maroon communities displayed a "will" in plantation society that the protagonists understood. They represented the altering of those relations, and organised

production in a way that negated plantation society, liberated territory and sustained a separate nation (like the Black Jacobins of Haiti). They were a social movement, and over time the name "Maroon" became synonymous with the tradition of voluntary collective work for the community's benefit; work that could not be used against the social interest (Santiago-Valles 2003). This was Sankofa.

Motivations to Home Educate

The nature of the response from Sankofa's co-creators could have gone in diverse directions. Many parents of African heritage had adopted strategies that showed preferences for selective or private schools, or the sending of children to Africa or the Caribbean for schooling. The intention was that the young people would return for College or University. My choice some ten years earlier had been the latter. My sons Kwame and Kamau received the latter years of primary and secondary schooling in Jamaica. Their university education would be experienced in the USA.

The choice of the co-creators of the Sankofa Learning Centre to introduce a home education facility was inspired by Eden Charles. It was one choice alongside the participation in the supplementary schools movement and the exodus to private education. Parents involved in this quality of action were concerned about the academic non-achievement of African children. Increasingly though, concern grew related to the fact that their children were not receiving an education focused on their needs as African young people in British society. Many 'home educating' parents involved with Sankofa had concerns that their children's history, culture, social and spiritual needs were not being met in a manner that enabled them to reach their full potential. Low expectations of schooling in the British education system had set in.

These concerns of the 'home educating' parents were powerful motivators. Many felt that they could not remain passive with the growing incidence of disaffection amongst young people and their being 'at risk'. Parents considered that the failure of the educational system to meet their children needs had had disastrous consequences on their life chances. They also felt that the quality of relationships that existed with peers, families and communities had been impacted adversely.

As home educators the parents had their individual and varied motivations. They included dissatisfaction with school discipline and safety, bullying, poor standards of behaviour in school and the low quality of education and/or the curriculum offered. Some parents cited cultural and/ or ideological beliefs, differences in lifestyle/educational philosophy, and even concern over how sex education was taught. Some parents were strongly opposed to traditional forms of education and teaching believing in more informal forms of learning (such as autonomous learning, and progressive learning). Parents who considered that their children had special educational needs felt that their children needs were not being adequately met in school. These included children with dyslexia, autism and those who were gifted and talented. The lack of choice in secondary school, parents' health and risk of school exclusion were other reasons.

The decision then to home educate for many parents was a preferred choice. For some parents it was the first and only alternative. For others, the decision to home educate was seen as a last resort and the only remaining option when conflict with the school or Local Authority could not be resolved. In such cases, parents cited that if the child's needs had been met (for example, if bullying had been addressed, the child's special education needs catered for, or concerns regarding the child's welfare

in school listened to and acted upon) the child would not have been withdrawn from school.

Later for some parents there would be opportunities for flexi-schooling (where the child is registered at school but attended Sankofa only part time). Many of the parents considered that their children would enter school or college and attend university at some point in the future. Often this was something mooted in the context of children obtaining formal qualifications such as GCSE, O and A levels for career development or university attendance.

These were challenges that the co-creators faced and met and it is testimony to our creativity that we were able to work with this diverse range of needs. However, in the importance of our children's education, amongst us there was little variation and this, together with acknowledgement that we had to do something differentt to bring about change in unsatisfying conditions was a spur for our acting.

Charles (2007) suggested as much in appreciation that there was no need to use the school model, and found an approach suited to those who initially embraced the initiative. I certainly agree that it was Sankofa's relevance philosophically and politically to parents being responsible for their children's education individually and as a collective/community, which was central to Sankofa's underpinning.

Charles (2007) explained:

> *'In England, at that time, what constituted a school legally was that it, a) called itself one or b) had a regular teaching timetable. Once you did either of these things you would have to register as a school and become subject to the national rules and regulations for schools, including OfSTED inspection and regulation. Given that we did not want to be 'controlled' in terms of what we could teach then the alternative became crystal clear, once we had thought of it. It just hit*

> *me one day "Why call ourselves a school"? Philosophically and politically it would fit much better if we said that each parent was taking responsibility for the home education of their children and coming together with other parents to share resources, time and ideas in the education of their children"*(pp. 125-161).

Further, Charles (2007) noted that most significant in the Sankofa Learning Centre coming into existence was our decision to change the description of our learning approach, in a way relevant to our ambition. This, he noted, revealed "the value of starting off with clarity about what you need and then creating something that meets that, irrespective of labels and previous descriptions of what was needed to provide a good education" (p. 131). Charles concluded, 'Once I had the idea the next stage was how to make it work' (p. 131).

How did it work? Finding a way out of no way

In making the idea work Charles explained that it was agreed Ian Phillips would teach and manage the project for about 75% of the time, and that his (Charles') role would be to subsidise the project from his own earnings until it became self-sustaining. Charles believed that he could earn enough in the time that he was not at the project and would also be able to relieve me from performing the core role for much of the other 25% of the time (Charles 2007, pp. 125-161). It is with such plans that dreams are conceived (or should I say sacrifices made) and sustained in efforts to bring about change in the conditions of African peoples.

Additionally, Charles believed that the project needed a name and one day Phillips suggested 'Sankofa'. Sankofa he noted was a mythical Akan (West African peoples

located in present day Ghana) bird that is depicted walking forwards with its head pointing backwards. The bird holds an object in its mouth that signifies wisdom that it has picked up from the past and which it is using to shine a light into the future. Charles says he 'loved it' (the name Sankofa) and we very soon adopted the name, the 'Sankofa Learning Centre' (Charles 2007, pp. 125-161). I say more on the Sankofa bird below.

However, I feel as if I have reached an important milestone. I have informed the reader of the background conditions that motivated parents to act in their children's educational interests. I have shared some of the qualities of the Maroons and likened them to resemblances in Sankofa. I have shared some of the diverse motivations of the Sankofa's parents, the emergent idea to home educate, how the name Sankofa was adopted and the plan of how the leadership arrangement would work. These matters are all secured in the Weave.

I move away from the loom and Marshall's and Reason's (1994), "Am I taking an attitude of inquiry?" come into my thoughts. I self enquire:

Am I curious?
Have I a willingness to articulate and explore purposes?
Is humility included in my embrace?
Am I participant – present in my own research?
Have I that radical empiricism?

Suffice it to say here, that I am pleased with where I have reached, for I consider that my curiosity is alive and my willingness to articulate and explore Sankofa's purpose, and my own is evident in my study. On humility I defer, but I also feel that I am present and participant in my research.

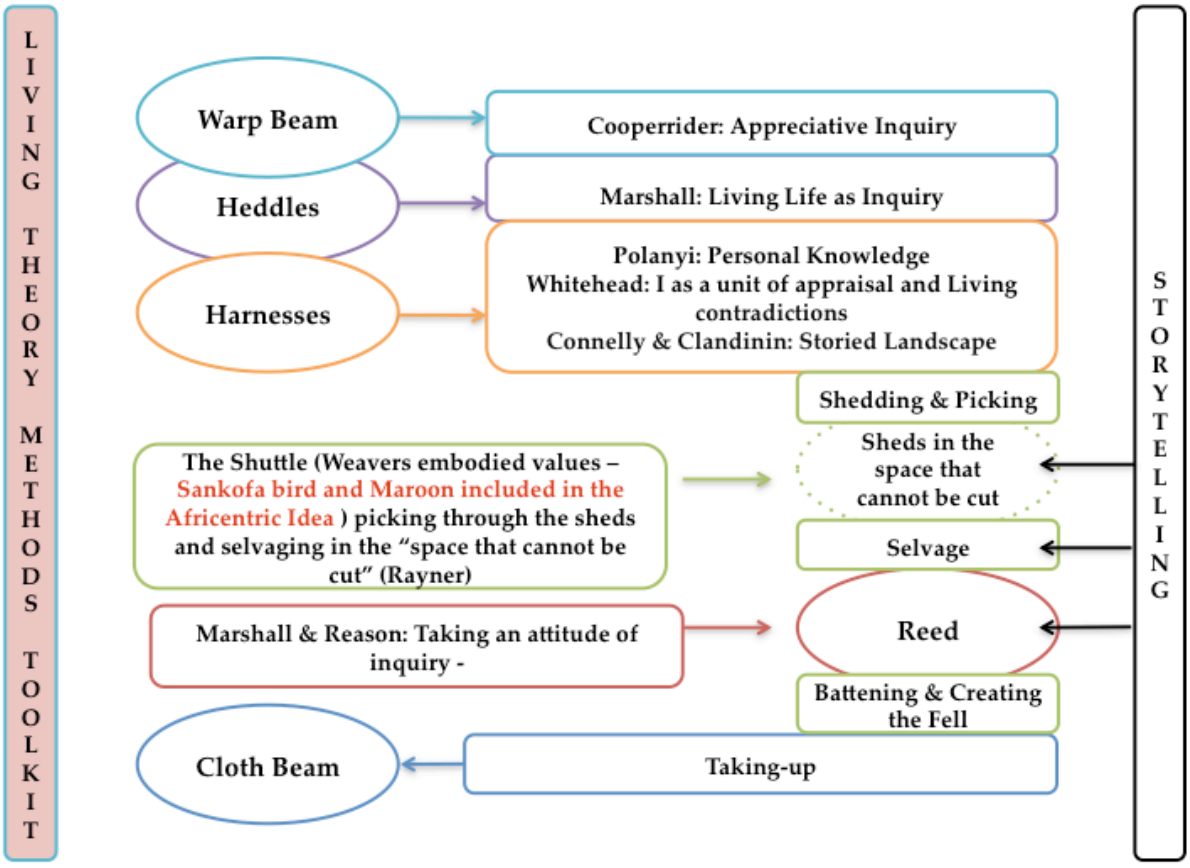
Have I that radical empiricism? It certainly feels so, but I will come back to consider that in greater detail further on in this weave.

It is to a more intricate part of my study that I now attend, for there is an arraignment of threads on the loom table that is drawing my attention. They present as complex, and knotted. However, as I attend to them their entanglement are not as I had anticipated. They are brightly coloured and the distinctiveness of the threads enables a simple untwisting.

I return to the loom and consider the weft threads in the shuttle. These weft threads represent my living values. The shuttle is my head, heart and spiritual being in complementation and it is to my live commitment to the African Voice that has surfaced to which I am attending. This is my African humanism and in relation to these threads I can discern some older threads still stirring (that I can associate with influences like Garvey, Fanon, Nkrumah), as echoes of voices like that of CLR James, Angela Davis, Seke Toure and Amilcar Cabral enter my consciousness. Newer threads include the Karenga's Nguzu Saba and the tenets of his celebration of Kwanzaa[11] and Ladner's Timeless Values, which draws from the experiences of Africans values relevant for present day living. The thread that is raised in the shuttle is of the traditional Maroon. I place the coloured threads that had so interested me on the loom table alongside the Maroon. The new additions are representative of Akan symbolism (inclusive of the Sankofa bird) and the Africentric Idea.

[11] Kwanzaa is an African American celebration (26 December - 1 January) of family, community, culture. Its seven principles are Umoja (Unity); Kujichagulia (Self-Determination); Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility) Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) Nia (Purpose) and Kuumba (Creativity)

Figure 19: Sankofa bird and Maroon included in the African Voice



Akan Symbolism and the Sankofa Bird

It is the Akan saying, "In the depth of wisdom abounds knowledge and thoughtfulness. I consider and keep what I learn," which opens this section giving consideration to Akan symbolism. It tells of the importance of knowledge and knowing, references the symbolic Sankofa Bird and the foundational values that inspired the naming of the Sankofa Learning Centre.

The importance of script in my Cloth in language or symbolic form has been noted earlier. In Akan symbolism what we have is an ideographic and pictographic writing system integrated into the Akan's philosophy. The Akans reside mostly in West Africa (Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire) and communicate their ideas across diverse media, including textiles, metal casting, woodcarving, and architecture.

The Akan's symbolism, important in their art, is also of great significance in their everyday life. Proverbs, fables and stories are in aall cultures to entertain and to teach. However, for the Akan peoples, it is the powerful joining of the words with images that is representative of their symbology.

The concept of Sankofa in the Akan language is expressed as "se wo were fi nawosankofa a yenki." Literally translated it means 'it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot'. The Akan believe that the past illuminates the present and that the search for knowledge is a life-long process. The pictograph illustrates the quest for knowledge, while the proverb suggests the rightness of such a quest as long as it is based on knowledge of the past.

However, the image of the mythological bird with its head bent looking backward has been interpreted and re-interpreted in different ways. At times, it can symbolise the chief who can see all, even things behind him. It has also been used as a symbol for the Akan idea that the past can help to guide the future or the thought that, if a mistake has been made or something is forgotten, the wrong can be made right and that one can learn from experience. These ideas connect both with appreciative inquiry and Marshall's notion of 'living life as inquiry' and is of value in inquiring into my own influence and that of others and social formations (Whitehead, 1989) in the explicating of my living educational theory.

It is my view that in the Sankofa Learning Centre, the Sankofa symbol, which brings uniquely into focus Africa's historic past, was utilised toward building our future. I very much appreciate what Temple (2009) says of the widespread practical use of

Sankofa among African-Americans in the United States. It is used to substantiate and characterise diverse elements of Black life and s the black community's thirst for culturally relevant philosophies. Temple states that:

> *"Sankofa practice is influenced by several orientations toward African consciousness: (a) as the legacy of natural cultural behaviours documented in its early usage by enslaved Africans who came to the Americas and in later usage, possibly, through epic memory; (b) as resistance with respect to rejecting Eurocentric language and world views and insisting on the relevance of using African conceptual possibilities to define and characterisese African life in the contemporary era; and (c) as the symbolic gestures of Diasporan Africans interested in general forms of "returning to the source," or psychological steps toward Africanness. Beyond its usage by Africans, there is also the aspect of Sankofa appearing in non-African space due to cultural borrowing in an age of popular forms of diversity and multiculturalism."* (pp, 127-150)

If there was anything that was consistent about the messages communicated across the Sankofa Learning Centre it was the notion of learning from the past, working toward being free within ourselves and the freeing of our minds to explore and evolve in the present and future in ways that celebrated the African Voice (the Africentric[12] idea). We were challenged to place the African worldview in the centre of the room/and in our academy. In doing so, we chose an educational path that was not without controversy.

Karenga's writing in the Introduction to Black Studies (2001) says:

> *"Black History stresses … the importance of the ongoing project of historical recovery to every field in Black Studies. This process is called Sankofa, an Akan word which means "to return and recover it." This involves returning to the rich resource of the African past, or history, and using it as a foundation to improve the present and enhance the future. . . . This process of returning to the course in the constant quest for valuable and diverse knowledge of African peoples and African culture has become a central concept and practice in all fields of Black Studies. . . . It is from this ongoing process of Sankofa that Black Studies scholars discover and*

[12] Africentric:

> *recover some of its most important paradigms of African thought and practice. And these data are used not only to constantly develop and expand the discipline, but also as a critical resource to understand and address the major issues of our time. (p. 78)*

Therefore, for Karenga, Sankofa as an Afrocentric methodological practice of historical recovery is not simply the collection of data, as from an African centred perspective it is also a critical analysis of meaning. This is what is truly of significance in my living theory thesis. Karenga suggests:

> *"In its most expansive understanding and definition, Sankofa contains three basic elements and processes: (1) an ongoing quest for knowledge, that is to say, a continuing search for truth and meaning in history and the world; (2) a return to the source, to one's history and culture for grounding and models in one's unique cultural way of being human in the world; (3) a critical retrieval and reclaiming of the past, especially the hidden, denied and undiscovered truths of the African initiative and experience in the world"*(pp. 555-556).

Karenga continued that critical retrieval meant:

> *"an analytical approach to things encountered, a below-the-surface grasping for deeper and larger meanings that routine competence cannot provide. And I use critical reclaiming in its meaning of extracting the valuable from the midst of the waste which surrounds it, i.e., the falsification and intellectually deficient interpretations of African history and culture."* (pp. 555-556)

Karenga's expansive definition and framing of Sankofa as methodological tool and vehicle for meaning-making encapsulates much of what the name Sankofa meant for me. The connection with Africa was important, that the name could be put to use as an idea and as practice was significant and that Sankofa had portent for meeting our contemporary challenges inspiring. The epistemological importance of Karenga's definition of Sankofa to my own living theory included with narrative is significant, for it is this embrace in my own study that I am enabled to value "a below-the-surface grasping for deeper and larger meanings." This is the purpose of my "My Emergent African Great Story", the use of the metaphor as if weaving of a traditional African cloth and the application of my loom. This contrasts with propositional

approaches to notions of epistemology and inquiry methodology. This was the importance of the name Sankofa to me. I had a sense that it was embraced in similar ways by the other co-creators of the Sankofa Learning Centre.

In my African Great Story it is the twin symbols of the traditional Maroon and inspiring Sankofa bird that I am seeking to inscribe on my Cloth. It is to record and celebrate the success of a humble, yet special group of people who courageously set out to impact the educational landscape of children of African origin in the UK, by placing the African Voice in the centre of our children's education. This was our home education innovation.

Therefore, in my own inquiry it is my perspective and practices as 'home educator' embodying the African Voice included with the valued meanings of the Maroon and Sankofa bird that is celebrated and under scrutiny. This is the case as I seek to evidence what I am doing to improve how I communicate the African Voice in my learning, living and working in ways that are authentic, African and at the same time understandable to non-Africans and to the academy.

The Sankofa Learning Centre was launched in August 1998 after less than a years' preparation from conception to actuality. Charles (2007) said he learned 'something huge about taking action to make things happen (p.133)'. Integral to his learning was 'the fact that by not doing all the 'proper' things, by not working to established values of professionalism, we had managed to create something that was dynamic, effective and different and, most importantly – it existed!' (p. 133).

However, Sankofa did not spring up out of nowhere. For over two years, some parents had been meeting in each others' homes, determining their children needs, programming educational activities and evaluating how best their children needs could be met. Over this period the parents held open meetings, to which other parents were invited. These meetings were always well attended and the demand for 'relevant educational programming' constant. The parents concerns in the interest of their children were overwhelming and it was out of the aforementioned recognition and experiences that they brought their own success to the Sankofa Learning Centre.

It was the commitment of those individual parents to find new paths for determining their children's educational success and their enjoining to work together with two African-centred educational activists (Charles and Phillips) to create a holistic African-centred educational process that ensured the positive development of the SLC.

That two African-centred educational activists were involved in the SLC from its initial tentative steps in coming into being, should in no way deflect from the purposeful actions taken by these 'break away' parents, for it is they (as Maroon as the founding families) who collectively really made the SLC happen. The participation of the activists, though important, was essentially, in my view and from conversations with Charles to 'cooperate with these founding families in inquiring into how their children could be educated for success' and for the activists to use their experiences and that of the parents and children, to work together in shaping the SLC's provisions and the advancing of the collaborative mission of the SLC. We viewed this mission as to improve the nature and quality of education that children of African origin generally experience in the United Kingdom.

That one of the activists had a child who was a student of the SLC and the other known to many of the founding families, added to the authenticity of the activists' participation in the process. However, both activists had extensive life/professional experiences in formal and informal education, at a range of levels. They also had personal, organisational and radical community development experiences within African communities in the United Kingdom and internationally, over a considerable period of time. These experiences were utilised to build meaningful relationships with parents and children that were relevant to the SLC initiative.

I had a history of involvement in community organisations and supplementary schools that sought to challenge the poor educational experiences of children of African heritage in the English school system. This challenge continued in my roles as teacher, youth worker and manager/leader in formal and informal educational settings.

In a professional sense many of the positions that I have held and my substantive experiences as a researcher, volunteer and consultant has involved an underpinning quality and practice informed from an appreciation of diversity and commitment for the African Voice in the room.

I came to the Sankofa initiative motivated, and through dialogue with Charles, felt ready for the challenge. It had come at the right time. I had done the necessary work and appreciated the potential of the collective input. For notwithstanding Charles' vast experience and contribution, parents brought themselves a wide range of methods and experiences of home educating their children.

Parents also brought their experiences and their familiarity with methods of education that varied from highly structured and 'formal' programmes to highly 'informal', less 'conventional' approaches to learning.

At one end of the spectrum some parents had employed 'formal' structured routines of learning. Several were following the National Curriculum and some were using the online UK teaching and learning resource websites. Others were using American-based on-line materials or programmes of learning. Such 'formal' approaches made make use of textbooks, focus on formalised subjects/sessions and employed fixed hours of learning.

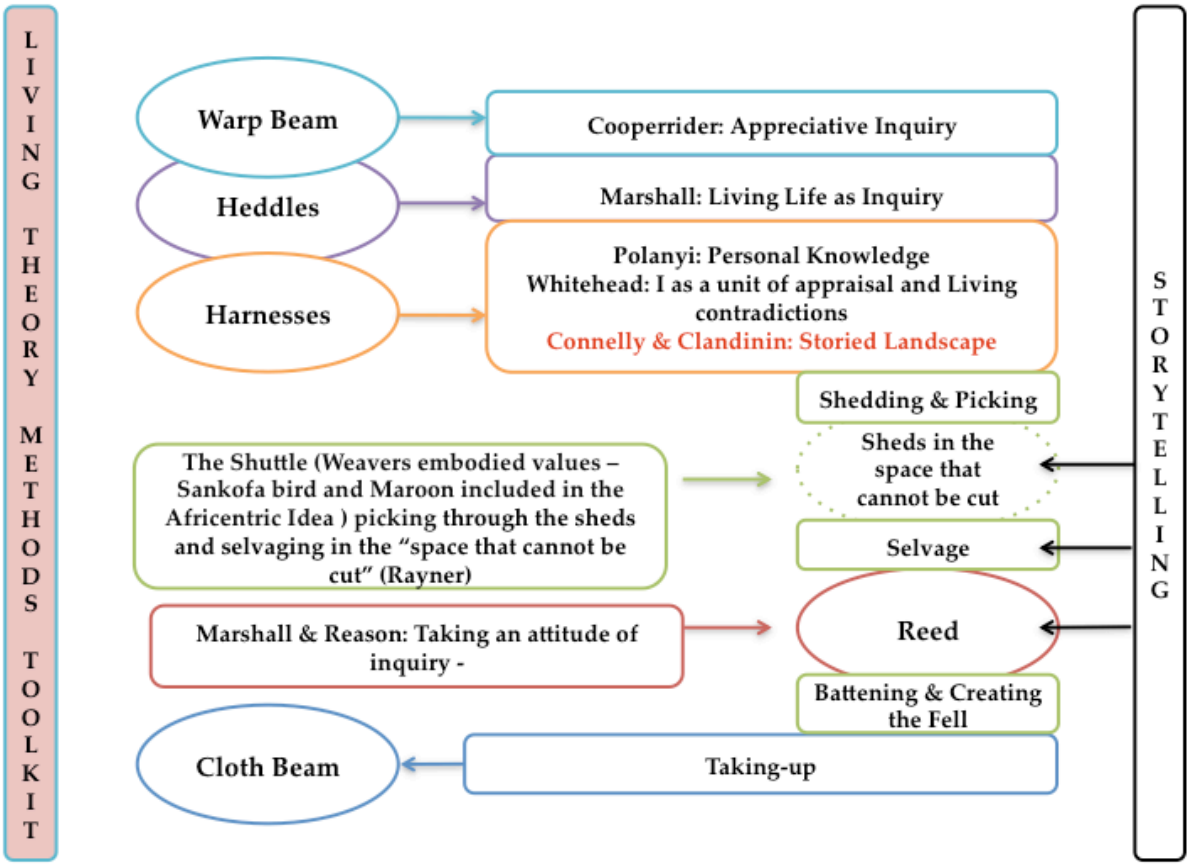
At the other end of the spectrum, some parents espoused more 'informal' practices that were responsive to the child's developing interests. These parents allowed their children to learn and acquire an education through everyday living experiences. Children were encouraged to pursue their own interests (like music, drama and art) rather than being directed to 'subjects' by adult 'educators'. Learning, in this sense, is seen as something that happens continually rather than something that occurs within the confines of a structured 'school' day.

In many cases parents had experiences of using a mixture of formal and informal methods, accessing a variety of materials and resources available and educating their children in a range of environments. Trips out to museums, theatre visits and participation in activity centres, for example, were considered important elements of education. However, whether formal or informal many parents had also used educational tutors and Saturday schools to supplement their children's education.

Secret, Sacred and Cover Stories

However, it is in exploring the stories (motivations and experiences) of the home educators as maroons (within the frame of I am because we are) in the Sankofa Learning Centre across diverse individual and interconnecting frames (as parents, children, teachers, students, activists, adults and co-learners) that I engage with the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1988) to proffer meaning to the development of the initiative.

Figure 20: Connelly and Clandinin Storied Landscape is on the Loom



Connelly and Clendenin (1988) "teachers personal practical knowledge" is employed alongside Polanyi's personal knowledge and Whitehead's unit of appraisal and living contradictions amongst the harnesses on my loom.

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) use the term the teacher's personal practical knowledge to proffer the idea of their experience in a way that:

> "…allows us to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons. Personal practical knowledge is in the teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions. Personal practical knowledge is found in the teacher's practice. It is, for any teacher, a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation." (p.25)

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) view teacher knowledge as storied life compositions, narratives of experience, which are both personal, reflecting a person's life history, and social reflecting the milieu, the contexts in which teachers live. They use the notions of secret, sacred and cover stories as a way of understanding 'the ways in which teacher knowledge is shaped by what they refer to as the professional knowledge landscape'. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) described secret stories as 'Lived Stories' (p25) of classroom practice where teachers have a degree of autonomy and when told, are usually to other teachers in 'other secret places' (p25).

Our experiences, as "home educators as Maroons," in co-creating the Sankofa Learning Centre can be framed with Clandinin and Connelly's professional knowledge landscape. However, I have a sense that our whole experience was a secret story. This was so at a number of levels, in that, we strove for so much of the time "safe-keeping" the "gem" that we had created, ensuring the conditions for its flowering as if in a greenhouse and the telling our inspiring liberation narratives as if there was not a moment to be lost.

Critical in our challenge was the co-creating of a facility for the personal and educational benefit of each child and relevant to the collective benefit of all the

participating children. We also included ourselves in the benefit, as learners, as members of a family and community.

Critical also was how we would work towards the educational success of our children. We (I) wanted to work with what worked towards building a thriving organisation. We (I) wanted, in my mind (our minds), to test our untested educational theories in what I/we would secretly say/believed was a 'full-time Africentric educational innovation. This was a novel idea and intervention in the UK in 1998.

Home education would be our strategic position. However, the tactics that we employed would provide substance for what could be distinguished as our secret, sacred and cover stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995).

In the Sankofa Learning Centre (SLC), we described our provision as an educational facility that offers "*children of African origin an excellent education, under the 'education otherwise regulations', which meets our children's needs and the related needs of our community*".

These words, grouped together as they are, may appear familiar. However, whether they are familiar or unfamiliar it is suggested that such a judgement is suspended, for the moment, and to let our story unfold, before making that judgement. This view is held because the form and the meaning given to the words that describes the SLC are derived from perspectives that speak to and emanate from our specific experiences as Africans living in the Diaspora, which has yet to be revealed.

It is our view that the SLC cannot be wholly described, nor fully understood within familiar terms. For example, that we at the SLC termed our provision an 'educational facility' and a "learning hub" and not a 'school' is instructive. It is instructive because it reflects the fact that we do not find the term 'school' useful for what we had set out to create. Hence, to simply find meaning by substituting the term 'educational facility' with the more familiar term, 'school' and fix it with the accompanying nuances would be inappropriate and would miss a pivotal starting point for understanding what the SLC is all about.

Furthermore, there are other words contained in the statements (mission and description) above, which too cannot be taken with a sense of familiarity for they are presented with a particularity that needs also to be understood. It is only with the understanding of that particularity will pertinent meaning be discovered to some of the fundamental questions that spring from the statements. For example, questions such as:

- *What is meant by improving the quality of the children's education?*
- *Who are the children of African origin?*
- *What are their general educational experiences in the United Kingdom?*
- *What is meant by the term "excellent" education?*
- *What is meant by 'education otherwise'?*
- *How are the needs of the children and their community determined?* (Phillips 1998).

From these questions, it can be seen that further questions can be raised and this is important, because the statements are both the results of former questions and the stimulus to further questions. It is this continuous questioning that characterises the

processes of rigour, the processes of movement within the SLC and leads to the particularity of how we at the SLC use terms that have familiarity, but may have an interpretation beyond that familiarity. In doing so, we shape the terms to the living experiences of those individuals that comprise the SLC. However, our interpretation also goes beyond our individuality, for it is not a wholly exclusive conceptualisation. Our intentionality for action extends beyond self to the widest African family, our community operating in the world. This is of importance, for it is through an appreciation of our dynamic inter-relationships (the SLC in motion) with the world and the particularity of our interpretations that emanates from our processes of rigour, which generates the quality of our experiences that serve to direct the SLC's educational thrust.

These experiences fuelled by our shared individual interpretations, actions, collaborative inquiries and collective actions have determined that we think, share and act, despite absurdities in the world, in an environment within which love exists, children and adults are nurtured, there is importance in caring for life and educational growth, in its widest sense is cherished.

Further, given that African children have specific needs then the education they received needed to be structured in such a way as to meet them. In addition to good resources and good teachers, African children needed understanding and love. They needed to be valued for who they are. Teachers needed to believe that they could achieve the highest heights and operate in a manner that supports that. African children needed to recognise that they have a great history and culture, see themselves and their families in a positive light, have positive images and role

models and be able to contribute to building good lives for themselves and their communities.

We were aware too, that as African peoples in the Diaspora, we had to think in ways that met our needs and prepare us "to survive in the world as it actually is" (home educators as maroons). The racism that we face cannot be counteracted simply by more-of-the-same-education. It needed an approach that specifically addressed the range of negative factors ranged against the African community in the UK and worldwide. However, that approach could not attend only to the impact of racism, that is, an appreciation of how the dominant culture impacts. We also needed to adopt a vision beyond racism that truly scoped our agenda for action. We needed to have a radical rethink about our children's education so that we and they can have pride, an awareness of our history and culture and to be able achieve success in our own terms. For us in the SLC this was the Africentric Idea. I am stirred and furtive in the shuttle.

The Africentric Idea

The co-creators of the SLC presented the Africentric Idea in diverse ways. However, what appeared to enjoin us was the sense that as Africans we had been decentred and moved off of our own cultural and historical journey. The oppression of Africans though, was important in any assessment of our condition or analysis of Africentric Idea. Therefore, recognition of the Africentric Idea as a quality of thought, perspective and practice that perceives Africans, as subjects and agents, in our influence was critical in the context of human experience. All definitions of the Africentric Idea have the notion of the centrality of the African experience and of our

agency. This is what the SLC sought to implement and did implement with a substantive amount of success.

However, it is my view that although our embodied notion of the Africentric Idea proffered a radical perspective, the Sankofa Learning Centre's contradictory societal positioning of being outside of the school system, yet part of the educational arrangements in the UK without exception, meant that it was not out of reach of those Clandinin and Connelly (1995), 'sacred stories' (p. 9), that inform and are "funnelled" down to teachers from those at the top of the educational hierarchy.

Interestingly, our posture as "home educators" embracing the Africentric Idea also showed a tension at the heart of the I SLC. In our resistance to becoming a school, in our explanation to what we were doing often times presented "home education" as cover, seemingly for a much more radical intention. The Africentric Idea was very much part of our secret storied agenda. It was not that people did not know what we were about. They did. Still, our embrace of home education, despite it great relevance, was appreciated as a decided part of our cover and was used in diverse ways to tell our cover stories.

Reframe of Secret, Sacred and Cover Stories

On sacred stories Clandinin and Connelly (1996) write that they originate from power sources (practitioners, policy makers, and theoreticians) outside of the classroom and are "littered with imposed prescriptions" (p. 25). These 'authoritarian stories they inform carry such power they ought not to be questioned (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996; 2000), and are characterised as the theory-driven view of practice, which have the quality of a 'sacred story' (p25).

For the 'home educators as Maroons' in the Sankofa Learning Centre this theory-driven view of practice, I suggest, is twin-sourced, in that, Clandinin and Connelly's sacred stories that are 'funnelled' down to teachers did not disappear, because we sought to distance ourselves from them and source and draw resource from elsewhere, with our embrace of the Africentric idea, which presents an alternative theory-driven view.

As noted earlier Sankofa still operated within the laws of the land and in our radical stance we still had to give recognition to power sources outside the classroom, even though we posed challenges to those authoritarian stories that carry such power that they ought not to be questioned (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996; 2000). Here, it should be noted that though our embrace of the home education option was a radical act, it was not an act that meant we had no interaction with the wider system. Indeed, our radical actions are provided for within educational arrangements in the UK.

The wider system still made impact when our children sat their SATs, GCSEs and GCEs within an expansive set of regulations. Sankofa was an examination centre and the missives did not escape our attention, administration and correspondence. The local educational authorities also intervened to challenge the 'rights' of parents to home educate, proffering onerous tests for the children to complete, so as to validate their development and make decisions about to financing the children's education. The disallowing of the principle that 'monies should follow the child' in their education, because it was the parents who had acted to withdraw from the schooling system impacted on how parents could support their children adequately.

Further, the wider system came into play when ex-partners of parents, sought to remove their children from attending SLC and to return them to traditional schooling. The levels of challenge were varied. However, one case was actually heard in court and required investigation on the suitability of the Sankofa Learning Centre in relation to the child's educational needs. I had my day in court in defence of the particular parent and child and the values of the Sankofa Learning Centre.

It was in these diverse ways that the wider system influenced our lived experiences as home educators as Maroons and more. It was a reminder that our escape though treasured, still required negotiation and compromise, and that challenges were systemic both in relation to the wider social system and from within the African community.

The negotiation/compromise was attended to through both necessity (parents wanted their children to sit exams) and through expediency (it was not problematic for our children to do examinations for their results compared favourably with their age-related peers). The challenges made us better prepared for interventions like that of the local authorities, in that we came to know what they wanted and what we had to give them. It was an exchange without seeking to influence.

Our communication with members of our African community, for example like those ex-partners not participating in the Sankofa initiative, however was to seek to influence them. We sought to understand where they were coming from, appreciate their values and give attention to what they brought to the table, as we listened to the concerns that they presented. We also sought to build relationship through demonstrating our respect, even in our contention and difference. We co-operated in

making decisions about what was best for the education of the child (the child and participating parent would be part of the process throughout and particularly in any decisions made). Further, the sharing of stories as a way of building conversation and inquiry enabled more effective communication was encouraged relationship to grow.

In SLC we would on occasion take time out to inquired into our compromise and embraced challenges to improve our practice, whilst enhancing our resolve to be successful in our endeavour (and we were) and actively working to still that 'voice' that made us wary of 'outsiders', particularly those whom we felt did not have the Sankofa Learning Centre's interest, as we sought to be inclusive as is the challenge of the Africentric Idea.

The Africentric Idea – The African Voice in the Centre of the Room

I have already explored aspects of the Africentric idea above in focus on the Sankofa bird and Maroon, so the intention here is to illuminate further my eclectic, yet dynamic and disciplined approach, which draws on diverse sources. However, (Myers, 1988) optimal theory does interest me. Optimal theory is viewed as a coherent framework for realising unity in diversity. This idea also appears in my embrace of The Paut Neteru later. It is in this way that optimal theory is seen as a method for accounting for individual and community action and the analysis of human behaviour through socially defined lenses, such as, "Race", ethnicity, gender, and physical ability. Optimal theory also offers an approach, which steers away from and transforms oppositional thinking by creating environments that supports the fullest diversity.

Drawn from the philosophical parameters of ancient traditions of African culture (eg. The Teachings of the Ptahoptep and Maat), each person is seen as an individual and unique expression of a systematic, self-perpetuating, and self-correcting life energy that is manifested in diverse ways.

Myers suggest these teachings are consistent with the building of good character and include caution against arrogance, taking advantage of the weak, violence, scheming and manipulation of others, boasting, disrespecting women, greed, purporting slander and so on.

Self control, honesty, fairness, generosity, respect, responsibility, building trust. Gentleness of speech, humbleness, being circumspect in matters of sexual relations and wisdom are among the behaviours strongly encouraged values.

Emerging in late 1970s, optimal theory embracing the Africentric and transpersonal schools of thought emphasised spirituality, beholding that humankind is one of life energy, and each individual is the unique creation of this life force. Thus energy is self-organising and ordered, functioning maximally under natural equilibrium, harmony and unity. Identity is seen as the individuated expression of a unified consciousness.

If you are alienated from the unity of consciousness and distant from your life energy, estrangement occurs, connection with other lost and proclivity for oppression grows.

Self worth is assumed to be intrinsic, independent of external form and life is seen as a process of integrating and expanding ones sense of self to discover its spiritual essence.

Myers (1996) suggests that an Africentric worldview can be described as optimal "if one places value on peace, harmony, balance and positive interpersonal relationships" (p. 20). I can embrace this and it in accord with my values. Optimal theory (Myers, 1988) also emphasises that an Africentric worldview is characterised by a nonmaterial, spiritual reality, which places value on qualities such as honesty, integrity, trust-worthiness, and compassion, as opposed to more material, external criteria such as personal appearance, academic degrees, possessions, and renown. I laugh at myself for a moment, as I thinking about the completing of my PhD, which has taken up so much of my life recently. I know that these studies matter to me. However, I suspect what Myers is getting to is how much weight one gives to possessions and things external in comparison to your inner condition, your spirituality. Indeed, material and spiritual unity is celebrated in optimal theory.

Further, Mbiti (1970) articulates the Africentric view that individuals cannot exist alone; instead they exist interelationally with ancestors, the unborn, nature, each other, the community, and everything else in the universe. This is Mbiti's optimal theory. Consistent with these assumptions, the Africentric worldview values unity, cooperative effort, mutual responsibility, empathy, and reconciliation (Baldwin, 1981; Nobles, 1974). A final tenet of optimal theory concerns epistemology. Gaining knowledge results from a process of active engagement, or confronting challenges, which are often viewed as opportunities for growth. If I did not believe this before, well I certainly do now in my learning, living and working. My loom has the

complements of appreciative inquiry (Cooperider 1989), living life as inquiry (Marshall 1999), living contradictions (Whitehead 1989) that focus on active engagement, confronting challenges and seeking opportunities for improvement. Indeed, my own storytelling has this quality, as in "Create Your Own Dance".

The Africentric themes in optimal theory proffer the qualities that were significant in my own influence and that of others and in the social formations in the Sankofa Learning Centre. However, also significant at the time in Sankofa were Kerenga's (1966) Nguzu Saba and Ladner's, The Ties That Bind: Timeless Values for African American Families (Ladner 2000) and Copage's Black Pearls (1996). This did not mean that we did not draw from the widest resource, but these works had a practicality and relevance in a way that was palatable to the young people, families and a developing learning community.

Still, literature on the Africentric idea presents diverse perspectives. There are differences among Africentric scholars as to whether an Africentric worldview is innately determined (Kambon, 1992, 2004), or whether it is exclusive to persons of African descent (Azibo, 1996; Grills, 2004; Kambon, 2004). However, there is some agreement that there is at some level of consciousness amongst most people of African descent embodiment of the Africentric idea (Belgrade and Allison, 2006).

In my embrace of the African idea, it is about the investigation, understanding and validation of African experiences and histories, as well as a critique of the continued exclusion and marginalisation of African knowledge systems from educational texts and mainstream academic knowledge, and scholarship. Africentricity, for me, is about inclusion, particularly, in a world where the marginalisation of African

peoples' experiences and the subjugation of their identities continue to present such unsatisfying circumstances as is evidenced in the demise of “black boys” (boys of African heritage).

However, I feel that we have work to do here though, for the notion of Africentricity that I have commitment to would also confront the excluding of marginalised voices in African contexts and assert valuing social relationships and formations. It is a commitment, now to the widest community for the inclusion of all excluded voices.

This is so because in the Africentric idea although its influence in inspiring the practice of co-creators of the Sankofa Learning Centre and the telling of our secret stories is undoubted. They also give evidence of how this alternative universal worldview, when embraced as a kind of static blueprint or template have those same qualities that are extant in Clandinin’s sacred stories. It is in this way that the Africentric Idea gets interpreted in doctrinal, dogmatic and static ways. (In the commitment to the Africentric Idea there are also practitioners, policy makers, and theoreticians). Later, I explore how in my own lived experiences, the ‘theory driven’ form of the Africentric Idea that conferred ‘authority’ in the Sankofa Learning Centre and my own ‘static’ appreciation of the African Voice compromised my appreciation of community and inclusionality.

Additionally, we home educators as Maroons had our cover stories. Cover stories are the stories that teachers tell to be “acceptable” in the places outside of the safe zone of their classrooms (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; 1996; 2000). These cover stories allow a teacher to perform the role of ‘expert’ and to negotiate the dilemmas of living in both protected and public educational spheres.

The ‘cover stories ‘that the home educators as Maroons of the Sankofa Learning Centre tell in the space outside of their safe zone to be ‘acceptable’ are reflective of their home education practice included with the Africentric Idea. This was how we presented the nature of expertise in order to negotiate the dilemmas of living in both protected and public spheres.

We were members of Education Otherwise, an organisation that provides support and information for families whose children are being educated outside school, and for those upholding the freedom of families to take responsibility for the education of their children.

According to the 1996 education act in England and Wales, it is parents who are responsible for providing their children's education 'in school or otherwise', suitable for the age, ability and aptitude of their child. Home educators in the UK do not have to be trained teachers, nor do they need any special qualifications to educate their children at home. There are no rules for how families go about their home educating in the UK. It's up to each family to ensure that their children receive appropriate education. This is what the founding families of the Sankofa Learning Centre set out to do.

As home educators our cover stories enabled us to perform within the wider context of the educational system in ways that we were accepted, yet still able to continue to practice and maintain the liberation content of our children’s education. This was important to us.

In this reframe of Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) storied landscape the 'theory driven view' that presents as authoritarian stories that carry such power that they ought not to be questioned as informed by Clandinin and Connelly (1996, p25), is alongside the Africentric Idea that offers an alternative perspective with its own powerful narrative and influence. Together they provide evidence of a 'twin-sacred storied influence'. It is in appreciating this twin-influence, integral to our effective practice in the Sankofa Learning Centre, that successful communication within our own environs and with the wider social system was sought. The cover stories are how others see our situation or what we as home educators as maroons want others to believe about us. In choosing our controversial pathway we had to know when to wear our masks and when it was appropriate to reveal our passion. In this Weave taking the responsibility within the frame of 'I am because we are' the mask is down, as I am revealing my passion – our passions in participating in the Sankofa Great Story. This living theory thesis is not a cover story. A twin-scared storied influence is not contested. It is my/our secret story/ies that is being made public, in my valuing Polanyi's (1958, 1998) personal knowledge, and valuing Whitehead's (1989) notion of 'a unit of appraisal', in the framing of this living theory thesis that focuses on knowing my own influence in my own learning and that of others and social formation.

It is in this way (with a sense of criticality) that the co-creators of the Sankofa Learning Centre sought to make impact on the educational landscape of children of African origin in the UK, by placing the African Voice in the centre of the room as their secret stories.

My role in leading, influencing and co-creating a positive learning, living and work environment as co-leader, uncle, educator and learner (Seba) amongst an array of roles was to be of importance.

The overwhelming emotion for me was how quickly we had got to a place of good reputation and a readiness for the challenge ahead. Dialogue amongst the co-creators celebrated our different voices. The children and young people part of the initiative appeared excited about the novel journey they had commenced and there was an energy not to replicate what we felt 'school' was about.

In my view we were already being successful when I started on the CARPP programme. In terms of achievement and attainment we did not set out to measure (possibly we should have done), but we felt so close to what was happening that our *perceptions* on the effects and achievements of what was going on with our children made sure that we focused on realities. The effects of our home education facility reported by parents and children/young people from my journal notes (Phillips 2000) included:

- **Personal benefits** such as:
    - High levels of confidence and self-esteem;
    - Happier children;
    - High standards of behaviour;
    - Ability to mix with children and adults;

- **Family benefits** such as:
    - A close relationship between parent and child;

- **Benefits for lifelong learning**, for example:

- A self-directed approach to learning;
- Motivation to learn;

- **Developments in line with age-related peers**:
    - Some parents believed their children to be successfully following the curriculum at the level of, or in advance of, their age-related peers. There was evidence in SAT results and one boy did pass his GCSE in English at age 12 (Phillips 1998).

    - Some parents who had withdrawn their children from school to home educate because of concerns over their welfare, reported mental health benefits as well as 'educational' progress such as improved self-confidence.

In Sankofa we were proud of our achievements and the initiative developed with confidence, overcoming some early teething problems to face up to the challenges of managing the tension of the parent-teacher role that had to be performed; working effectively with the tension between Sankofa as a community project and business development initiative; and increasingly the challenging of working with the values of the founding families and those families that came to Sankofa through collaboration with schools.

The founding families had an appreciation of Sankofa that embraced the Sankofa as being born with them. Families and young people who came once Sankofa had commenced could not replicate those "ties" and their engagement sometimes meant that Sankofa services were viewed as a place of last resort. This was particularly, so for those young people for whom the prospect of permanent exclusion from school was the determining factor for their arrival at Sankofa's doorstep. In some such instances the schools paid for our services. Later Sankofa would support children permanently excluded from school and their parents.

The Africentric Idea appeared to be thriving, as evidenced below. As part of my enquiries I posed the following questions to young people who participated in the Sankofa Learning Centre and with whom I have Facebook contact. The questions were as follows:

What do you think was great about Sankofa when I was teaching there?
What do think were the qualities or values I brought to Sankofa?
What was my greatest impact on you or Sankofa?
What could I have done better?

Facebook Replies

I offer three of the replies.

Frankie Paniro June 12, 2010 at 12:02pm Reply

1. I think what was great about Sankofa was the diversity in the teachings. Every teacher had a different element in his or her form of teaching and that contributed greatly to my learning.

2. I think the qualities and values you (Uncle Ian) bought to Sankofa were very underrated to a degree that others including myself took for granted and took misleadingly. For example, not long after I left Sankofa I came to realise, the qualities and values I had interpreted Sankofa to behold, were Pride, Determination & Resilience. These are three factors that were taught to me spiritually as well as mentally through Sankofa and to that element, I owe you a great thanks.

3. The greatest impact on me was the appreciation of accepting who I am and accepting that I have the capability of achieving anything I believe in.

4. A longer expanded experience.... in learning content and exploration of beliefs.

Hotep, Love & Light.

Duane Davis, June 12, 2010

1) What was great about Sankofa when you were there was the relaxed and reassuring atmosphere you brought to the place. You helped to lead with a jovial personality alongside an equally welcoming and authoritative attitude. We, the students knew when it was work time, and when it was playtime and this helped to instil a sense of responsibility and discipline in the place.

2) The qualities you brought matched those of a strong, close family. There was a lot of love and respect, which helped us to create positive bonds. I believe the students benefited from your positive outlook and the way in which you carried yourself in the face of adversity. Belief and faith was almost tangible with the way you

developed your relationship with the students and your colleagues.

3) Your greatest impact was you drilling belief into the lives of young, black impressionable children, especially the boys. I left thinking of you as my mentor - and I'm sure every other person left feeling the same way. You earned great respect by giving us your time, and so much of it, you showed you cared by wanting to be there which in turn helped with our self-esteem and made us want to conduct ourselves in a seriously positive, professional and successful way.

Nkwa Underwood June 24 at 8:18pm Reply

Sankofa for me represented a haven from boredom!! It actually stretched me, in a way that mainstream school wouldn't. Also enjoyed the holistic approach to learning.... education/ healthy eating/living/allotments/ sports etc.

You brought a central figure, who, it seemed, could be approached for all things trivial, all things serious, and everything in between. Your amazing sense of humour and caring nature, mixed with a passion and desire to see us succeed was a winning combination. Allowing pupils to self value, and not be 'another number' in a school with thousands of pupils.

Biggest impact: allowing me to have a wholly unconventional teaching experience (in a good way) Allowing me to believe in myself. Exploring and expanding my capabilities.'

All was not Well in the Sankofa Learning Centre

However, all was not well in the Africentric and Maroon creation. Charles notes the impact of his loss of monies. Three mothers died whilst I was at Sankofa. All of them tragic in their own way, in that they passed still young in age. Each made a courageous and inspiring contribution to Sankofa. I was particularly torn by Varina Drummond's passing, whom I had known from our teenage years. She was the mother of one of the children in Sankofa and her eldest daughter was my niece. Varina taught music to the children in her own home. She passed from breast cancer, but very few of us knew until a very late stage of her illness. I remember her full of life, loving, humorous and decisive in her youth and adulthood. She offered the same as mother, parent and teacher.

Two mothers experienced mental ill-health and I myself became seriously ill (I was hospitalised). The Maroons had another set of secret stories, sacred stories and cover stories. I am challenged to say that it is reflective of our contradictory existence (being out, but not really out – being in but not really in).

The secret stories related to self-thoughts of invincibility. The sacred stories involved upholding views that had long outlived their usefulness. The cover stories saw us modeling success, but not giving full recognition to our great sacrifice (revolutionary suicide). My health would confront me.

It is my health (my stuckness) in the widest context that I consider in the Appendix Six ('Being Stuck' - Shuttle and Weft Not Aligned in Large Fabric: I Can Hear Jack[13] – I would hear jack), as I began to consider my own secret, sacred and cover stories and seek recovery. I am on the boundaries once more in the place of decision and indecision, and in retreat, as I self inquire into challenging mindset issues as I struggled to complete my transfer paper for continuing my PhD studies.

There was stuckness in my learning, living and working. This stuckness became even more apparent when I struggled to answer a question about my studies asked by one of my peers in my tutorial group. Graham asked: *Ian, what is it that you do? What is it that you are trying to do in your study?* I would give an answer, but somehow felt that I had not been clear. Jack Whitehead my tutor would offer that my writings appeared to focus on the Great Story. However, this would be lost on me, though it would spark my interest. I would also find stuckness in my loom as I explored the meaning of community and inclusionality in my learning, living and working. However, I

[13]In this title and indeed in this paper I make a play on the word "Jack". I use the name Jack for my tutor who is Jack Whitehead and I use the term jack to mean nothing.

completed my PhD transfer paper as I struggled with my stuckness to write importantly about my mindset, relationship with my father (Simultaneous Thoughts) and my African birthing (I Made the Journey).

There would be much unfinished business though as evidenced in Appendix Six, and it is this unfinished business that my next Weave seeks to attend. In this next Weave I am also making progress with moving beyond my "stuckness' and I am no longer in Sankofa.

My living theory methodology toolkit is given new life as I engage with Scharmer's Theory U and Presencing, to utilise a second type and source of learning, inquire into the behavioural level for change and use tools (downloading, listening, seeing, dialoguing, sensing, reframing and in retreat) to access my deep levels of knowing. I am engaging integrously with living theory methods and acting for profound change in my learning, living and working as a way out of my "stuckness."

In this Weave I have sought to explain how the Sankofa Learning Centre emerged on the educational landscape for children of African heritage. I also gave evidence of the underpinning of the home education innovation included with the twin appliqué of the Sankofa bird and Maroon, proffering meaning to the Africentric idea. Further, I informed on the nature of our success from the parents' view and from the voices of the children.

The Weave closed with the earmarking of some of the issues of concern that were emerging, particularly that of my own illness. However, my illness though

significant would mask more deep-seated issues that were in need of attention both in the Sankofa Learning Centre, and in my own leadership and social relationship.

In my own learning, living and working I would discover stuckness. In Appendix Six focus is on this discovery and Weave Four I would be challenged to act for change. In Weave Four I demonstrate how I move on through engagement with Scharmer's (2000) Theory U and presencing, I utilise a second type and source of learning, inquire into Sankofa's and my own levels of behavioural responses to change and seek to access deep levels of my knowing.